

VZCZCXRO6447  
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHNK #0287/01 1121731  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 221731Z APR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8355  
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0621  
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0543  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0605  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2148  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0953  
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0178  
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE  
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0623  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1062

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000287

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTORAL COMMISSION MEMBER RESIGNS FROM "MAFIA MACHINE"

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 251

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DENNIS HANKINS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Sid'Ahmed Ould Habott, a prestigious member of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), resigned April 20 as he believes the CENI's objective is not to organize free and fair elections but to certify Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz's electoral victory. For Ould Habott, organizing an election in five weeks is impossible. Objectively, the CENI is not prepared from a logistical and technical point of view. Also, Ould Habott believes the election should not be held unless a consensus is reached among all parties. Ould Habott stated the election is a sham, confirmed that members of the government are intent on ensuring Aziz's election, and described the CENI as a "mafia machine." He warned that participation in the election would mean "political suicide" for the opposition and said a boycott is the best strategy. He believes Ould Abdel Aziz is a Libyan satellite and that Qadhafi is fueling and supporting the General's ambitions. End summary.

-----  
EMPTY PROMISES  
-----

¶2. (C) PolOff met April 21 with Ould Habott, a respected human rights activist and member of the 2005-2007 democratic transition CENI, to discuss the reasons behind his resignation. Ould Habbot explained that he had left CENI due to a "misunderstanding" between him and CENI President Professor Cheikh Saad Bouh Camara. Ould Habott stated that, when he joined CENI, he thought the commission could use its influence to promote political consensus and change the electoral calendar. He said he met four times with Prime Minister Moulaye Ould Mohamed Ladhaf, who reassured him that the military would be open to suggestions from CENI. The Prime Minister said they were looking for credible and influential figures like him and Professor Camara to provide direction. Nevertheless, Ould Habott soon realized he was just being used to legitimize a CENI designed to certify Ould Abdel Aziz's election. (Note: Ould Habott resigned exactly one week after joining CENI. End note.) "My conscience will not let me do that," he stated. Comment: Professor Camara and Ould Habott are intimate friends. PolOff is not

surprised Ould Habott believed CENI could influence the election date and promote consensus as Professor Camara also alluded to these themes in a conversation with PolOff (Reftel). Camara insisted that it was not certain that General Aziz would run or that the election would take place on June 6. PolOff thinks Camara might have influenced Ould Habott into believing they could single-handedly change the situation from their CENI positions. End comment.

-----  
A SLAPDASH ELECTION  
-----

13. (C) Ould Habott stated that he had vast experience planning elections and that he knew there was "no way on earth" the CENI could organize free and fair elections in five weeks. He told PolOff that CENI currently does not have headquarters, no vehicles or computers and no time to train the presidents and members of departmental commissions across the country. He was adamant the election date had to be pushed to allow CENI to organize from a logistic and technical point of view. He also felt any extra time should be devoted to achieving political consensus with the opposition parties. Ould Habott said he asked Camara to raise this with the military but Camara refused. He then realized that Camara had been co-opted by the military. Comment: Ould Habott's statement that he asked Camara to consult with the military confirms that the military is still running the country. He did not say "to consult with President Ba M'Bare." End comment.

NOUAKCHOTT 00000287 002 OF 003

14. (C) "There is no question the election will be rigged," he said. He declared himself shocked at hearing ministers currently serving in the government say that "they would do anything to ensure Aziz was elected president." Comment: This comes as no surprise as General Aziz appointed tribal members and supporters to key ministries. End comment.

15. (C) As the meeting progressed, Ould Habott became increasingly upset. He said the CENI was "a mafia machine" and stated the elections had to be boycotted as participating in these elections would mean "political suicide" for the opposition. He believes Ould Abdel Aziz could not win in a transparent election. From his experience in the 2007 election, he knows that despite all the money, threats and traffic of influences that took place, President Abdallahi only got a mediocre percentage in the first round. Comment: Ould Habott's admission of 2007 election manipulations confirms that CENI members at the time were not oblivious to the military's use of influence to elect President Abdallahi. End comment.

16. (C) When PolOff asked if he expected others to resign, Ould Habott looked despondent and responded that the only person who would have been capable of resigning was Camara but that Camara seems to be in complete agreement with the military. PolOff asked if he thought Camara had been paid by the military. He said he thought Camara had a "recognition" crisis. He stated he was very disappointed at Camara and felt he had betrayed the principles they had fought for all their lives.

17. (C) Ould Habott warned PolOff about a potential wave of repression following the elections. He stated that once Ould Abdel Aziz secures the presidency, he will lash out against everybody who opposed him. When PolOff asked him if he feared for his security, Ould Habott stated he did not, that he had already survived Ould Taya.

-----  
QADHAFI TURNED THE TIDE  
-----

18. (C) Having tried to work as a mediator since the

beginning of the crisis, Ould Habott had access to the different actors -- including General Aziz -- and said he had identified a willingness to negotiate on the part of the military. Nevertheless, after Qadhafi's visit, he noticed a change of heart in General Aziz. Ould Habott believes that Ould Abdel Aziz struck a deal with Qadhafi and that Qadhafi is paying for the election and encouraging Aziz to run. Ould Habott would not be surprised if Mauritania became a Libyan satellite in the region. "Knowing Qadhafi," said Ould Habott, "he would not have come to Nouakchott for nothing. Whenever he gets involved, he expects to recoup his investment at least ten-fold."

-----  
NEXT STEPS  
-----

¶9. (C) Ould Habott published a press release stating that he cannot participate in CENI because he believes consensus is a necessary condition to the election. He said he intends to continue working towards a mediation effort and to participate in anti-coup protests.

¶10. (C) According to Ould Habott, only a strong and united opposition or international intervention can stop Aziz. Nevertheless, he feared neither would be the case but he said he would keep fighting.

¶11. (C) Comment: Ould Habott's testimony comes as a confirmation of what post already suspected: the June 6 election is a sham to install Ould Abdel Aziz in the presidency. Ould Habott is among those who thought they

NOUAKCHOTT 00000287 003 OF 003

could play with the devil and win. He realized quickly enough he could not and was courageous enough to get out. His resignation represents a blow to CENI and exposes the true nature of the election. Assuming the elections go forward as planned, Ould Habott's testimony will be key in establishing the illegitimacy of the process and the "winner." End comment.  
HANKINS